

26 SEPTEMBER 2015

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

On the occasion of *Allan Sekula: Fish Story, to be continued*10.30AM – 4.45PM | *The Single Screen*, Block 43 Malan RoadAllan Sekula, *The Forgotten Space* (2010), film still.

NTU CCA Singapore presents an International Symposium dedicated to the late photographer, theorist, photography historian and critic, Allan Sekula. Situated within the context of Allan Sekula's exhibition *Fish Story, to be continued* at NTU CCA Singapore, the symposium will mark a concluding point to the show and highlight the continued relevance of his work and writing on the theme of globalisation.

The programme of the symposium will focus on key themes underlying Allan Sekula's practice including questions of critical realism in contemporary art, representation of labour as well as the vast topic of the sea as the "forgotten space" of the contemporary global economy.

SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS

The symposium will bring together art professionals who have collaborated with Allan Sekula across the years and who will share their insights and experience of working with the artist. The list of contributors comprises: **Hilde Van Gelder** (Director of the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Leuven), **Carles Guerra** (Director of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona), **Roger Buerger** (Director of the Johann Jacobs Museum, Zurich), **Mercedes Vicente**, Curator and Writer (PhD Candidate, Royal College of Art, London).

In the second part of the symposium, the complexities of the maritime world and maritime nations unpacked by Allan Sekula in his extensive research will be grounded in the local context of Singapore, an important harbour in colonial and post-colonial times. Contributors to this discussion include **Shabbir Hussain Mustafa** (Curator for the Singapore Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale) **Charles Lim** (Artist for the Singapore Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale) and **Chung Chee Kit** (Naval Architect and former Director of Keppel). The symposium will be moderated by **Ute Meta Bauer** (Founding Director of NTU CCA Singapore) and **Anca Rujoiu** (Curator, Exhibitions of NTU CCA Singapore).

Acknowledgments:

Frac Bretagne | Museum of Modern Art, New York | Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Collection, Vienna

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

Part I: *Working with Allan Sekula*

10:50am | Welcome note by Ute Meta Bauer with Anca Rujoiu

11:00 – 11:30am | Keynote: *Working with Allan Sekula* by Hilde Van Gelder

This lecture addresses a selection of collaborations and exchanges between Allan Sekula and Hilde Van Gelder during the last decade of the artist's life. Starting from the outdoor billboard panel installation *Shipwreck and Workers*, which Sekula exhibited at STUK Arts Centre in Leuven in 2005 and two years later at Documenta 12 in Kassel, the discussion will lead up to *Ship of Fools / The Dockers' Museum* (2010-2013) – Sekula's last and, sadly, incomplete project. That trajectory will allow us to understand in more depth the many ways in which *Fish Story* (1990-1995) was the decisive, foundational project for most, if not all, of Sekula's later works, which we have come to understand in terms of "critical realism" (as coined by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh).

11:30 – 12:00pm | Presentation: *Arrested Flow* by Carles Guerra

On November 19, 2002 the Galician coast suffered one the biggest ecological disasters. A tanker carrying 77,000 tons of fuel oil split in half at about 130 miles offshore. The fuel oil released from the single-hulled tanker soon reached the Spanish, Portuguese and French coastline and polluted the seabed and its beaches. In spite of the overwhelming evidence, the conservative government ruling Spain at the time denied the immediate and severe consequences of the oil spill. The national media made invisible what became a massive reaction of the population who undertook a mobilisation to clean up thousands of kilometers invaded by the *chapapote*. The disaster turned into a spectacular organisation. Corrupt leaders and volunteers engaging in a Sisyphean task shared the stage. For Allan Sekula, a photographer committed in the long-term to the peculiarities of the maritime economies, this was beyond the logic of the documentary. In Galicia he experienced the absurdity of the events as they were gathered and recollected by factual descriptions. That is to say, he who championed documentary aesthetics experienced the limits of such a genre. Finding impossible to report in a journalistic vein, *Black Tide. Fragments for an Opera* (2003) delivered a pseudo-photojournalistic approach to the disaster. This was the result of an invitation issued by the newspaper *La Vanguardia* that brought the two of us together during the last days of December 2002. The result, one of the rare interventions Allan ever did in a newspaper, was finally published early in 2003. Footage from these days was to be included in *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006), where the disaster appears as a fleeting episode in a more ambitious constellation describing a global disorder based on the power that emanates from the sea.

12.00 – 12.30pm | Presentation by Roger Buerger

12.30 – 1:00pm | Q & A – Moderated by Ute Meta Bauer and Anca Rujoiu

1.00 – 2.00 pm | Lunch Break

2.00 – 2.30 pm | Presentation: *Every page a victory. Who cooked the feast for the victors?* (Poem "Questions From a Worker Who Reads", Bertolt Brecht 1935) by Mercedes Vicente

This presentation will draw on some of the themes that Allan Sekula's essayistic film *The Lottery of the Sea* touches upon – free markets, democracy, war – built around a bank of images of the lives of working people that form the backdrop and the social and political fabric of what we term globalisation.

At the roundtable discussion, Vicente will also introduce parallels between Allan Sekula's and Darcy Lange's mutual interest in the representation of labour, their fidelity to the social referent in photographic and moving image practices, and their commitment to critically question realism while being understood and articulated through their different approaches. Sekula's 'critical realism' sought structuralist semiotics as a way to engage with the complexity of social representation, while Lange's positivism offered a systematic and aesthetically uninflected approach that rejected artistic expression for its prevailing social referential function. Both were invested in the image of work and of the people at work so seldom portrayed and in documentary's potential of social transformation.

Part II: The Sea as Forgotten Space2.30 – 3.30pm | Conversation between *Chung Chee Kit, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa & Charles Lim*

3.30 – 3.45pm | Coffee Break

3.45 – 4.45 pm | Final roundtable discussion

BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS

Hilde Van Gelder is a curator, writer and the director of the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, together with Alexander Streitberger (Université catholique de Louvain). She is editor of the Lieven Gevaert Series (University Press Leuven). With a background in law and philosophy, her research focuses on how photographic and moving image as contemporary art can contribute to shaping insights into the current state of the global political and socio-economic sphere. She has published on a wide range of artists, including Allan Sekula, Victor Burgin, Peter Friedl, Gilles Saussier, and Bruno Serralongue. She is the co-editor of *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art, Around Allan Sekula's Photography*.

Carles Guerra is an artist, art critic and independent curator based in Barcelona. He was the Chief Curator at MACBA (2011-2013) and Director of La Virreina Centre de la Imatge (2009-2011). Guerra is currently an associate professor at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra. In 2011, he was awarded the *Ciutat de Barcelona Prize* for his contribution in the field of visual arts. He is currently the member of the editorial board at *Cultura/s* since 2001 where he authored numerous essays, *N for Negri* (2000), *Allan Sekula speaks with Carles Guerra* (2005) and *Negatives of Europe. Video Essays and Collective Pedagogies* (2008).

Roger Buerger is an art critic, a curator, and a member of Parasophia: Kyoto International Festival of Contemporary Culture 2015's Professional Advisory Board. Before serving as a guest curator for the Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona he taught art history at Luneburg University (1999-2005) and the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe (2007-09). He was appointed the artistic director of Documenta XII (Kassel, 2007) with art historian and curator Ruth Noack. Buerger also served as the artistic director of the 6th Busan Biennale (2012). In 2010, he was appointed the Founding Director of the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich, an exhibition space and research institution dedicated to the cultural residue of global trade routes.

Mercedes Vicente is a curator and writer undertaking an AHRC-funded PhD at the Royal College of Art, London. Prior to her current studies, Mercedes worked in New York and New Zealand. She was Curator of Contemporary Art at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and Darcy Lange Curator-at-Large. Mercedes earned masters' degrees in Film and the Arts at New York University and in Curatorial Studies at Bard College and was the Helena Rubinstein Curatorial Fellow at the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York. Recent curatorial projects include *Art and Social Change Research Project: Delhi Residency*, 2013 (Te Tuhi and The Physics Room 2014); *Vestigios invisibles* (EACC, 2014), and at Govett-Brewster: Walters Prize nominee Maddie Leach's *If you find the good oil let us know* (2013). She is also contributing editor of *Darcy Lange: Study of an Artist at Work* (Govett-Brewster and Ikon Gallery, 2008) published in conjunction with the exhibition *Darcy Lange Work Studies in Schools* (Ikon Gallery, 2008).

Shabbir Hussain Mustafa is Curator at the National Gallery of Singapore, where he researches on art from Singapore and Southeast Asia. He was formerly Curator at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Museum from 2007 till 2013.

Charles Lim sees Singapore like no other artist. As a former professional sailor, his senses are keenly attuned to environments we rarely see and to forces most of us do not even notice. His early collaborative project, *tsunamii.net*, which participated in Documenta 11 (2002) traced the hidden submarine infrastructure that underpins our global computer networks. After sailing for Singapore in the 1996 Olympics, Lim studied Fine Art at Central Saint Martins School of Art and Design, London, graduating in 2001. His *SEA STATE* series is an ongoing body of work that has been exhibited at the Dojima River Biennale, Osaka (2013); Lyon Biennial Rendez-Vous 13 at the Institut d'art contemporain Villeurbanne (2013); the Singapore Biennale (2011); Manifesta 7, Trentino-South Tyrol (2008); Shanghai Biennale (2008). Lim's moving image works have been screened in international film festivals at Rotterdam, Tribeca and Edinburgh. His multi-award-winning short film, *All The Lines Flow Out*, premiered at the 68th Venice Film Festival, winning a Special Mention, the first award ever won there by a Singaporean production.

Chung Chee Kit graduated in Naval Architecture from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom. His career with Keppel Corporation, Straits Steamship and IMC Shipping brought him into contact with ship repair, shipbuilding, offshore engineering, ship management and port development, and he has developed a deep love for all things connected with the sea and ships. Currently retired, he now enjoys painting maritime subjects, and is an advocate of a greater appreciation of maritime heritage in Singapore.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION, *FISH STORY, TO BE CONTINUED*

The exhibition *Fish Story, to be continued* (3 July – 27 September 2015) brings together at NTU CCA Singapore core works of Allan Sekula's research of the global maritime industry from the collections of Fond Regional d'art contemporain Bretagne, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21), Vienna. Curated by Ute Meta Bauer and Anca Rujoiu (NTU CCA Singapore), the exhibition introduces chapters from *Fish Story* (1988 – 1993) alongside two filmic extensions of the project, *Lottery of the Sea* (2006) and *The Forgotten Space* (2010), co-directed with the film theorist and director Noël Burch.

In juxtaposition to Allan Sekula's exhibition, NTU CCA Singapore invited the curator Mercedes Vicente (Darcy Lange Curator-at-Large) to present *Darcy Lange: Hard, however, and useful is the small, day-to-day work* (12 August – 27 September 2015). This selection of works by the late New Zealand artist Darcy Lange from the Darcy Lange Estate and Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, examines these two artistic practices that meet in a shared interest of representing labour, yet through different approaches.

Fish Story, to be continued and *Darcy Lange: Hard, however, and useful is the small day-to-day work* punctuate NTU CCA Singapore's overarching narrative PLACE.LABOUR.CAPITAL.

NTU CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART SINGAPORE

The NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore (NTU CCA Singapore), opened in October 2013, is a national research centre of Nanyang Technological University developed with support from the Economic Development Board, Singapore. Located in Gillman Barracks alongside a cluster of international galleries, NTU CCA Singapore led by Founding Director, Professor Ute Meta Bauer takes a holistic approach towards art and culture, intertwining its three platforms: exhibitions, residencies, research & education.

NTU CCA Singapore positions itself as a centre for critical discourse and experimental practices for Singapore, the region and beyond. It aims to play an active role within the local art scene, and contribute to the development of regional and international art infrastructures.

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